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ABSTRACT

The position of private elementary and secondary education can be improved by the development of closer relationships with the chief state school officer. This interaction can be increased by the organization of a private education advisory committee at the state level. Attention should be paid to the activities of legislative committees and state education regulatory agencies. In addition, public education leaders should be invited to participate in the meetings, conferences, and conventions of private education groups. Those in public education can assist private schools by providing testing services and other accountability activities, disseminating information about federal programs and state aid programs, and helping to understand and implement Public Law 94-142 (federal handicapped education law). (MLF)

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PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS: COLLABORATORS FOR THE GENERAL GOOD

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American private education has made a long journey in its relations with the public sector. If one views history from a cyclical perspective, we've completed the circle. Early American education made little distinction between public and private education. In fact, our earliest educational institutions were founded by private organizations. At that time, there was little differentiation between private and public purposes. It wasn't until the 1800s that our nation began to draw a sharp distinction between public and private educational institutions.

We now appear to have made the circle and are returning to a concern about the delivery of educational and other social services rather than being overly concerned about the structure that delivers them.

The federal government has assisted in this development with NDEA, ESEA, the Great Society and the "Education for All--Handicapped Education Act" of 1977.

Even without this federal stimulus, we would be moving toward a new partnership. There is a growing awareness in our modern society which realizes the interdependence of our population, that our resources are not inexhaustible, and that we must do a better job with what resources we have available.

Even with this emerging consensus, we can all do much to encourage and facilitate this spirit of collaboration between public and private schools.

My remarks will deal with the K-12 sector of the school system,

because this is the area within which I generally operate. However, the general thrust of my comments may be appropriate at other levels of educational activities.

Whenever we discuss educational programs or the delivery of educational services, it is extremely important that we place our emphasis on the recipient rather than upon the type of institution delivering those services. This recipient emphasis immediately transfers the argument to the student and to the quality of the program. At this level, private education comes from a strong position. The product of these institutions is noted for its high qualities.

The state school agency in many states--including my own--is responsible for the education of all young people between the ages of 6 and 18. Whether or not those students are enrolled in public or private institutions is immaterial. What is important is whether or not that student is enrolled in an appropriate--or approved--school and is receiving an education.

In Washington state, all students must be enrolled in an approved school. This means that the Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Board of Education must examine and approve all schools which students attend.

As a result, we have established an office of nonpublic education in our agency. One function of this section is to examine and coordinate the approval of nonpublic schools.

In the years 1973-74, we approved 223 private schools, and by this year we will have approved 334 nonpublic schools. Not only does this office examine private schools and make recommendations to the State Board of Education for its approval, but it provides these same schools with technical assistance to meet state approval standards.

Many private schools are not familiar with state regulations or

state bureaucracy and, therefore, need assistance in this process. In essence, the attitude of the state should be of a positive nature--helping nonpublic schools to meet their legitimate goals and aspirations.

One effort that will improve the position of K-12 private education is in the development of closer relationships with the chief state school officer. As many of you are aware, historically the position of the Council of Chief State School Officers has been one of opposition to any public aid for private education. It is interesting to note that in November 1977, the Council altered this stand with a policy statement that calls for "each state to provide educational benefits to all children to the full extent allowable."

The new breed of chief state school officer is willing and anxious to provide the best education possible in his or her state. Private schools can be a significant part of this effort. Any efforts that can increase the communications, knowledge and involvement between the chief state school officer and the State Board of Education and private education will help both groups.

What are some ways that this interaction can be increased?

One activity that is fundamental and absolutely necessary for the private school community is to be cohesive and well organized. The chief state school officer, the legislature or any other decision-maker will find it much easier to communicate with (or more difficult to ignore, whichever the case may be) a united front of the nonpublic community.

In a large multi-facet political system, a group speaks louder than the individual. The individual is still of primary importance, however. A combination of individuals carries more impact than one lone voice.

In the state of Washington, the Washington Federation of Independent Schools and its shadow organization presents this type of unified front.

This group is looked to as the voice of nonpublic education in the state of Washington. As a result, private education has had an impact on legislation and the activities of the state educational agency. When representatives are sought for advisory groups, et cetera, it is the Washington Federation of Independent Schools that is consulted. As a result, private education is routinely involved in important educational decisions in Washington.

One method for integrating private and public education is through the organization of a private education advisory committee at the state level. Private schools are unique institutions, and they complement the public schools of a state. The formation of an advisory committee will move education toward this goal. The advisory committee should not be composed solely of private education people.

In fact, it should represent the various communities of interest within the education field. This type of activity will sensitize those outside the private education sector to the problems and the activities of private education as well as advance the interests of private schools.

In the state of Washington, this advisory body is named the Private Education Advisory Committee. It is heavily relied upon for advice by the state office of education. It would be unthinkable to start a program in my state which impacts private education without asking the Private Education Advisory Committee for its recommendations.

Public education leaders should be invited to participate in your meetings, conferences and conventions. These people should be leaders at the local, county and/or state level. Much of what I've learned about private education has been gathered at meetings such as these. My experience with the Washington Federation of Independent Schools, the Seventh-day Adventists, the Catholic Schools and other private

schools has certainly increased my knowledge and sensitivity about private education in my state. This interchange will be of value to all those individuals involved.

Attention to the activities of legislative committees, the State Board of Education and other education regulatory agencies is of extreme importance. This activity will allow you to anticipate and plan for activities, regulations, et cetera, which will have an impact upon your operation. Too often those affected by these agencies are caught responding after the fact--when the decision is already made. To be a part of the decision requires planning and attention to the proper agencies.

In addition, by attending State Board of Education, legislative committee and other meetings, your presence will increase your future influence. Regular attention to these groups will not only enhance your reputation but will serve notice that you expect to be involved and consulted in their deliberations. This is how a democracy works, and you must exert your potential influence. To do less is to abdicate your responsibility as leaders in American education.

The entire responsibility for improving and building a spirit of collaboration between public and private education is not entirely the responsibility of the private school sector. We whose responsibility is primarily in the public area also have a responsibility to build this consensus. It is easy for each group to hide in a little niche and complain about those who do not understand the problems.

What can we in public education do? I've touched upon the involvement of private schools with representation within the state agency, the organization of a nonpublic education advisory committee, and there is more we can do.

In addition, we can assist by:

(1) disseminating information about state aid programs;

(2) providing information and help with the various federal programs (Title I, IVB, IVC, and others);

(3) providing testing services and other accountability activities;

(4) helping to understand and organizing for implementation of P.L. 94-142 (federal handicapped education law); and

(5) cooperating in state and federal legislative activities.

However, the most important element is the general spirit of collaboration and cooperation we can generate. If we understand and care about the education of all our citizens, then we will be successful in having elevated the educational process to the highest level available for our students, and our relationship will continue to be a constructive partnership.